

Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site News Release

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Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site to host documentary “Elvira’s Eyes” by 17 year-old student Sydney Shavers *Program commemorates Martin Luther King’s quest for equality and service*

RICHMOND, Va. – As the nation celebrates the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site will host, “Elvira’s Eyes,” a documentary produced by 17-year-old park volunteer Sydney Shavers. The presentation will take place on Martin Luther King Day, Monday, January 21, 2013 at 2:00 p.m. in the park’s visitor center at 600 N. 2nd St., in Richmond. It is free and open to the public.

The documentary tells the story of the Henrico High School senior’s quest to document more fully the story of her great-great-great grandmother, Elvira Sophia Abernathy, who lived during both slavery and segregation. Abernathy was born into slavery in 1833 in Burke County, N.C. She was enslaved during the first 28 years of her life and free during the last 78 years of her life. As Sydney observed, “She never witnessed a world without slavery or segregation.”

Sydney, a 2011 graduate of the Maggie L. Walker Leadership Institute, was inspired by two newspaper articles. In 1939, the Hickory (N.C.) Daily Record published a piece about Abernathy on her 106th birthday, entitled “Ex-slave is said to be County’s Oldest Person.” Seventy years later, in 2009, the Richmond Times Dispatch ran an article entitled “Civil War birthday planning continues. Organizers want to incorporate voices of slaves, women.” Moved by these two items, Sydney determined to study her ancestor’s story and produce a documentary that she could share with others. “Elvira’s Eyes” is the story of her genealogical journey through 106 years of an African American woman’s life and her family’s triumph over societal challenges. After the screening, she will discuss the techniques she used to discover and interpret Elvira’s story so that others might do the same within their families.

“Both stories – Sydney’s and that of her great-great-great grandmother – are inspiring examples of the triumph of human spirit and aspiration,” said David Ruth, the park’s superintendent. “We are proud to highlight the experiences of these two remarkable women as part of our commemoration.”

Taking place each year on the third Monday in January, Martin Luther King Day is the only federal holiday observed as a national day of service – a “day on, not a day off.” In 2013, the nation will also observe the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington at which Dr. King delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech.

The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, home of the first African American woman in the United States to become president of a chartered bank, has been a National Park site since 1978. A national activist for the rights of African Americans and women, Maggie Walker also inspired young people to learn self-discipline, self-help, and selflessness, and groomed young leaders who knew the

importance of helping others and their communities. Guided tours of her restored home, located in historic Jackson Ward, are given by National Park rangers. The park visitor center is open Monday through Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Additional information is available at 804-771-2017, or on the web at www.nps.gov/mawa or www.facebook.com/MaggieL.WalkerNHS.

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